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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001679

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: A TALE OF TWO (SUB-PROVINCIAL) CITIES -  
ANTI-US ANGER, PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, for Reasons 1.4 (b  
,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Two sub-provincial capitals and several villages in Ankara province provide a window into parties' election preparations. Rival parties delivered the same angry message on US policies on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Iraq, and Israel. The visits also gave us a glimpse into the challenges affecting municipal leaders outside the ruling party. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The once-remote towns of Cubuk and Elmadag are rapidly becoming commuter suburbs of sprawling greater Ankara. Both sub-provinces attract economic migration from neighboring provinces and from eastern Central Anatolia. Cubuk, dominated by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), is primarily agricultural, specializing in animal husbandry (a major local project is the relocation of smelly barns away from Ankara's gentrifying suburbs to a vast centralized -- and discreetly located -- barn complex). Turks know Cubuk for its highly prized pickles. While Elmadag also is dominated by agriculture, it is one of only four subprovinces controlled by main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP); AKP straggles in at third place, behind the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Elmadag combines agriculture with a strong industrial component: it hosts over sixty factories, including the defense industry's Roketsan and several international operations, including Lever and Henkel.

Anger towards America: One Area of Bipartisan Agreement  
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¶3. (C) CHP officials in Elmadag and AKP officials in Elmadag and Cubuk, angered by the well-publicized deaths of soldiers "martyred" in Turkey's fight against the PKK, passionately condemned US policy in the region. All cited reports of alleged direct and indirect US aid to the PKK and its imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan (including direct aid drops to the PKK), our refusal to take on the terrorists in Northern Iraq, and our opposition to a Turkish cross-border operation. All conveyed the quixotic impression that the United States could wipe out the PKK in a heartbeat. They demanded to know why the United States preferred "tribal leaders" (meaning Iraqi President Talabani and Kurdistan Regional Government leader Barzani) to its long-time ally Turkey.

¶4. (C) AKP officials in both towns were even more vociferous in their anger. One participant openly declared the United States a "state sponsor of terrorism" before he was hushed by his chairman; although most were more tactful, their (mis)perceptions clearly pointed them to the same conclusion.

They railed against our perceived support of Israel at the expense of their fellow Muslims in Palestine and against our posture toward neighboring Iran. They were also deeply misinformed about the Abu Graibh incident, contending that the perpetrators went unpunished. Convinced of what they "knew," they considered our attempts to set the facts straight "unconvincing." Local AKP officials' deep discomfort with the US was framed by their perceptions of our relations with the broader Muslim world; violent deaths in Palestine and Iraq raised nearly as much concern as PKK-related deaths in Turkey, and all were attributed to US policies. The bitter tone of the conversation made it difficult to shift to other topics.

#### Election Posturing

¶5. (C) Party officials in both towns were focused on introducing parliamentary candidates to local constituents prior to the July 22 general elections. The day of our visit, a group of AKP candidates was visiting small shop owners and making the rounds in the town market. The Cubuk Chamber of Commerce chairman explained that the current system reveals the severe democratic deficit in Turkey's party structure; candidates do not rise from the grassroots but instead are anointed from the top. While parties had not yet released their national platforms, AKP and CHP local

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party chairmen seemed satisfied that the national message would be equally valid for the local area and would need no further tailoring.

¶6. (C) The Elmadag CHP chairman equated AKP's recent actions "against the regime" with CHP's rising prospects. Aside from this, he felt unemployment would be the main election issue. Locally, he would introduce the candidates to his constituents, but had no plan to reach out to voters, particularly in the villages, until the candidates rolled into town.

¶7. (C) In contrast, Cubuk AKP chairman predicted his party would win in a landslide, with MHP coming in second; his struggling Elmadag counterpart made a similar, but less credible claim. AKP party chairmen and women's auxiliary in both Cubuk and Elmadag believe that AKP has done well nationally under the charismatic Prime Minister Erdogan. In addition to introducing the candidates, AKP workers plan to link AKP's national achievements to local issues and successes. Unlike CHP's more hands-off approach, AKP's Women's Auxiliary will make house calls, attend funerals, and visit the sick in local hospitals.

#### Fight for Resources Party Related

¶8. (C) In a move calculated to win more resources for his town, the mayor of Sirkeli, one of Cubuk's satellite towns, switched from MHP to AKP. While mayors from the ruling party can attract more resources from regional and national governments, he maintained that, at the local level, personal connections and reputation are far more important than party membership. Despite his conversion, he continued to decorate his office with traditional MHP trappings, pictures of local martyrs and mythic Turkish heroes. The CHP mayor of Hasanoglan, a small town near Elmadag, concurred that non-AKP mayors have a harder time acquiring resources from Ankara but admitted that opposition parties had an easier time doing so under AKP than under previous governments.

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